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Daily Summary of Positions on INF

West European media continue to dissect US statements on arms control issues. French Gaullist leader Chirac expounds on the role of French nuclear systems in the Geneva talks. Moscow claims it is willing to scrap over 12 SS-20s. []

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UK

Most British papers reported that President Reagan will be flexible in the Geneva talks, with the pro-Tory Daily Mail quoting "White House aides" to this effect. The media nearly unanimously predict that the talks would mark time until after the West German elections, and that an eventual settlement probably would involve limited deployments on both sides. The Times editorialized that the Soviet offer to restrict deployment of SS-20s to the same number as British and French nuclear forces is "the worst of all possible solutions," and noted that talks along those lines should be in START--with London at the negotiating table. []

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West
Germany

Kohl, in an interview Wednesday, warned the SPD against claiming that he had promised INF deployment in West Germany even if the other West European countries refused. Kohl remarked that the SPD should decide carefully whether it wants to inject the missile issue into the election campaign. The PD's Egon Bahr is quoted by the press as indicating that his party would view a reduction of Soviet INF weapons to the 1975 or 1976 level as a sufficient reason for not deploying US missiles. Latest poll on the elections puts the CDU/CSU down one point to 47 percent. The SPD holds at 42 percent []

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France

Le Monde notes that "it is clear that Washington, under pressure from its European allies and whatever the results of the West German elections, will be led to abandon its 'zero option' to explore other avenues as Nitze just indicated." The pro-Socialist daily Le Matin recently noted that the Vice President will have to explain US "signals" on INF to a "perplexed European public." That daily adds, "It remains to be seen whose influence will carry the day in the White House: that of moderate Republicans or that of the conservative friends of Senator Helms, who has just obtained the head of Eugene Rostow." Chirac told US Embassy officials on Tuesday that he believed French nuclear systems "could be counted in the future under START negotiations." He added, however, that this did not mean that French forces would be reduced. He also restated his support for INF deployments and his opposition to including French systems in any INF agreement. []

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Comment: Paris, however, has consistently avoided even a vague reference to hypothetical French participation in START. The government's stand probably is dictated by at least two concerns: French participation in START could lead to increased Soviet pressures to limit French force modernization; if its forces are included in overall Western force ceilings, France could come under US pressure to reduce its forces, in order to permit enlargement of US capabilities. []

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